

Why is a ★ at end of some serial numbers?

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions about coins and currency.

Q—What's the purpose of a star at the end of a serial number on a dollar bill, such as A47937742★?

C.M., Cedar Lake, Ind.

A—The star indicates that your dollar replaced another bill damaged during the printing process. If officials destroy 100,000 newly printed notes because of printing mistakes (such as smeared ink or folded paper), then 100,000 star notes are produced as substitutes.

Star notes use their own consecutive numbering system. The government would waste time—and money—if it replaced each destroyed bill with another bearing an identical serial number.

Q—How can I be sure if the gold Maple Leaf coins I buy are authentic?

J.L., Chicago

A—You should patronize long-standing dealers who promise to make a refund if the coins prove to be worthless imitations. Then show the Maple Leafs to another dealer or expert for a "second opinion," and if you're still in doubt, have someone conduct a specific gravity test on the coins to calculate their gold purity (the test won't harm the metal).

Incidentally, under the Hobby Protection Act of 1973, any imitation numismatic item is supposed to be "plainly and permanently marked 'copy.'"

Q—A friend says I could greatly improve the appearance of my old silver coins by rubbing them with wet baking soda. Do you agree? Do shiny coins bring higher prices?

H.J., Chicago

A—The treatment probably will remove much of the dirt from your coins, but it also will leave an artificial shine that could reduce their value as collectibles. No amount of cleaning will restore worn or scratched parts of the design.

Q—What's a "jugate" and is it

rare?

Y.P., Chicago

A—Jugates are coins or other small objects that depict the heads of two persons on one side. A few U. S. commemorative half dollars carry such designs, including the 1923 coin showing presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams.